

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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Guidance in 'Worship in the Rural Church'*

By Edward K. Ziegler

In a superb painting entitled "Work and Worship," a great Indian artist, Jaminiprakash Ganguli, has portrayed the intimate relation of agriculture and worship. The scene is an Indian countryside at sunset. A Mohammedan farmer has spread out his prayer rug beside his oxen and plow, and kneeling with his face toward Mecca, is making his evening prayer with a look of serenity and devotion on his face which mirrors the effects of the quiet hour upon his spirit. This picture and the Angelus by Millet represent a fundamental activity of the human spirit which finds particularly fertile soil for its development in rural life. The highest activity of man is communion with God in worship, and the Christian farmer, whether he lives in Iowa or Bengal, the Sudan or Yunnan, under the shadow of Fujiyama or among the palms of Tahiti, can neither be a great farmer nor a great Christian unless worship is an integral part of his life experience.

It would be impossible to overstress the importance of private and corporate worship in Christian living. It is real, vital, life-transforming communion with the Source of all power and love, God, our Heavenly Father. The experience of true worship satisfies our hunger for contact with Reality. It is the soul's approach to God in wonder, adoration, love, praise, communion, intercession, and humble search for guidance and power. It is the response of the soul to the brooding tenderness, the matchless love, the pure holiness, and the awe-inspiring majesty of God. In it we consciously join our hearts with the Eternal Spirit in a mutual inter-change of thought, purpose and being. Through the experience, we find new power to win the victory over every form of evil and sin in ourselves and in our environment. We find release from anxiety, bad habit, fear, and those attitudes and traits which make us un-Christian in personal character and community and family relationships. The experience will give us new ethical insights, clarified vision, spiritual energies, serenity of spirit, and both vision and dynamic for enlightened social action.

*This paper was presented by the Rev. Edward K. Ziegler at the Annual Rural Missions Conference held at the New York State College of Agriculture, January, 1942. It was one of a number read in relation to the general topic of "Christian Mission Strategy in Rural Areas." While the paper was prepared with special reference to the younger rural churches around the world, it is felt that it also has significant value for the churches in America. The Rev. Ziegler is author of A Book of Worship for Village Churches, published by Agricultural Missions, Inc. He has recently written one of the series in the Pamphlet Library on Worship, entitled Country Altars, which is now being published by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. He is at the present time preparing an anthology of worship material for rural churches. The Rev. Ziegler, a former missionary of the Church of the Brethren in India, is now minister of the Brethren Church in York, Pennsylvania.

A further value of worship is found in the fact that it unites Christians in this highest pursuit, and thus builds fellowship stronger than that erected upon any other basis. In private worship the sense of solidarity with others is heightened, but in a far greater degree the experience of joint worship makes unsocial attitudes, selfishness and unbrotherliness impossible. All of these values are found in true worship in the rural churches of the world.

Guidance in worship is one of the supreme needs of the rural church across the world, in the development of a comprehensive church program to redeem the life of rural people. When I was a missionary in India, a thoughtful and cultured Hindu friend who was one of the most discerning and sympathetic critics of our work expressed the opinion that the greatest weakness of the Christian mission in rural areas was the tendency of the Christian church to secularize the life of the Indian farmer. Before becoming a Christian, many details of the farmer's life were intimately associated with religious beliefs and practises. The construction of the threshing floor, the threshing of the first sheaves of grain, the planting of the corner posts for a new dwelling-house, the digging of a well, the coming of the first monsoon rain, the birth of a child were all marked by some religious observance. Often the observance had elements of crude superstition and belief in magic and in the presence of witches and demons. When the farmer becomes a Christian, he has a new approach to life. Many of his superstitions and fears are erased. He acquires in the course of time a more scientific approach to agricultural processes, and this is all good. But there is a grave danger here, that his new religion may seem far removed from the concerns of his daily life and work. The ancient practises in his religion were designed to maintain a close and intimate tie-up of religion and daily life. The processes of his life and work, now no longer celebrated in religious ceremony, become more and more secularized, and finally totally divorced from religious association and control. When Christianity takes the place of the ancient faiths, something must happen to tie it up closely with the processes of daily life, lest the farmer cease becoming heathen only to become pagan. His new faith will seem barren and irrelevant.

A further demand for wise guidance in worship arises from the fact that in many countries of the world, the rural peoples among whom Christianity has found the greatest proportion of its adherents have been denied the advantages of the finest of their national culture. Christianity is in a very real way being naturalized into the various countries where it has been introduced. The Christian faith and life are now finding expression through the art, architecture, music and symbolism of the lands where the younger churches flourish. The full expression of Christianity is through the flowing together of two cultural streams. In every country, Christianity is bringing the age-old treasures of its life and worship as a part of a rich heritage. And since there are many elements of beauty and worth in the national culture of every people, Christianity, always hospitable to all truth and beauty, appropriates whatever is consonant with its own genius. The two cultural streams uniting produce in each land a Christian culture which is immeasurably richer than the national culture alone, and richer than the stream of Christian heritage which was brought by the missionary.

A major task of the Christian rural church in every land is to discover all those elements in their culture and life which can be used in the building up of a cultus of worship and pattern of life which transcends what they have already had, uniting it with the heritage from Christian history and tradition. The rural peoples of many lands hunger indeed for the bread and water of life, but they will never thoroughly appreciate nor appropriate it until they feel it is their own. The water of life must be offered in a Chinese or Indian cup; then the thirsty villager will drink and be satisfied. The Christ through whom the African or Polynesian or Japanese farmer worships his God must not be a Nordic Christ, but the Christ of the country road of every land, who will feel at home in the land of the worshipper.

year, frequently and thoroughly to relate life, as the farmer lives it, to the Source of all power and love. Without this intimate tie-up of religion and worship expression of religion with the daily life and work of the farmer, the Christian religion to him will be an empty abstraction, fit for theologians to argue over, but no bread for the hungry soul of an unlettered farmer and his wife and children. And without this close relationship, if the farmer becomes Christian, not only will his Christianity be a vague, abstract and lifeless thing, but his daily life will become secularized, unsatisfying and sub-Christian. Let the worship of God in the rural church give color, vision and power to the life of living Christian farmers, facing living problems. Let it give to the farmer a new sense of his dignity and worth as a cooperator with God in the eternal processes of creation of the goods of the earth, and a member of His great family.

A further word should be spoken about the adaptation of worship experience and materials and orders of worship to national cultures. I believe this is fundamental in making Christianity at home among the rural peoples of the world. A mark of real life which will be on-going and self-propagating in the rural churches is the baptism of elements of native culture and heritage and life into the service of the Christian church in worship. The Christian believes that all truth and beauty are of God. He believes that God hath not left Himself without witness among any peoples. Therefore, there are skills and heritages among every people which represent the contact of the human spirit in that race with the Divine. Forms of art, architecture and music are being freely used in many lands to express the "bringing of the glory and the treasure of the nations into the Kingdom of God." Just as every man is receiving the Word of God in his own tongue and reading it with tears of joy, so the outpouring of his spirit in worship is finding expression not only in the mother tongue of each church, but in the ancient forms of beauty and devotion in its national life.

Experiments have been made in the adaptation of festival seasons in various lands to the Christian worship pattern. An outstanding example of this trend is found in the transformation of some of the Hindu festivals in India, as described in my Book of Worship for Village Churches.¹ After all, it is true that most of the festivals which we celebrate in the West in the Christian year have their origins not only in Christian tradition, but in some long-celebrated festival season, hoary with antiquity, whose original meaning has long since been forgotten. Has not Christianity the power still to transform and use these natural seasons of joy and make them seasons of high worship experience and fellowship value in the church? In every land where the younger churches are taking root, a great deal of thought might well be given to the development of a Christian year for that land, taking into consideration the historic Christian festivals which are universal in their appeal, the appropriate agricultural seasons, and the natural occasions of festival celebration in the national culture of the country.

Many examples of the adaptation of the cultural resources of a people to the Christian worship cultus, and the intimate relationship of agricultural life and worship in the younger churches might be given. I am now collecting such examples from all over the world, to provide a companion volume to A Book of Worship for Village Churches. While much material has undoubtedly been delayed or withheld because of the war and its disruption of missionary and church life, yet sufficient has already been sent in to indicate the virility of the church in making itself at home in many nations and cultures. The beautiful and significant books by Dr. Daniel Johnson Fleming which have brought to us the ways in which the Christian life is finding expression in architecture, art, symbolism, and now prayer, in the lands of the younger churches are another indication of this encouraging trend.

The lovely art of several Chinese painters, who have dedicated their abundant talent in "spreading the silk" to painting Chinese Madonnas and Calvarys, is a notable example. The adoption of Indian lyric forms to send the Gospel message on wings of song throughout the Indian villages and the expression of the deep mystical life of the church in the psalms, hymns and ballad forms native to their musical expression are worthy demonstrations of the vigor of the church life in India. The dedication of hoes, oxen and seeds as the African farmer goes forth to plow and to sow his seed when the first summer rains fall is a touching ceremony embodying the best of what we have been discussing.

bration in joyous, life-transforming worship. The values here enumerated may be achieved by the celebration of certain Christian festivals of rural life, and by the right emphases in the building of worship orders throughout the Christian year.

The celebration of the festivals of Christmas and Easter, Lent, Pentecost and Thanksgiving are all times when the nearness of God in rural life may be stressed and made real in the life of rural peoples. Such distinctly rural observances as Arbor Day, Rural Life Sunday and Rogation Days, Festivals of Planting and the First Rains, First Fruits Festival, Dedication of rural dwelling houses, threshing floors, wells, barns, Lord's Acre plots, all have great possibilities for tying up worship with life. In all these occasions, there is an opportunity to develop and fortify the consciousness of the stewardship of the Holy Earth. Services of worship which center in giving thanks to God for one or another of the abundant natural resources with which the farmer deals, and dedication of his personal resources, material and human, to their stewardship rather than their exploitation, will be of value at any appropriate time of the year.

One of the greatest values of agriculture as a way of life is the security and stability which it gives to the home. The Christian church in all lands depends greatly upon rural homes to supply its leadership, even in the cities. Agriculture provides the appropriate setting for the development of the highest quality of home and family life on a basis of cooperation and mutual respect and aid. Economically, socially and religiously, the rural home offers great advantages over the urban home, and it encourages the rearing of sufficiently large families to maintain the best elements in the population on stable levels. Worship has an intimate relationship to the rural home. The values of the home and family should be celebrated and for them thanksgiving should be offered and intercessions made on frequent occasions in the rural church year. The Festival of the Christian Home, combining the best features of Mother's Day and Father's Day, Children's Day, the dedication of rural homes in simple ceremonies within the newly-build home, the dedication of little children, the marriages of Christian farm youth, the celebration of anniversaries in the rural home, all of these offer excellent opportunities for the expression of Christian ideals and the deepening of religious experience through life-centered worship experience.

The third major relationship in which rural church worship may dignify and revitalize country life across the world is in the field of community relationships. We are coming rapidly to see the importance of the cooperative principle in agricultural life as opposed to the competitive and acquisitive principle. The Christian church may be the mainspring of cooperative efforts for community living and welfare. Why should not the church in its wider program of evangelism, seeking as it does to Christianize all human relationships, provide a ritual for the installation of officers of the cooperative credit or marketing society within the village? Why should it not provide occasions of worship in which the other community organizations dedicate their efforts and their resources to human welfare? Why not worship orders which tie up with the literacy campaign, exalting it to even higher emphasis? One of the ways in which it can be of great inspiration is to provide worship materials in the simple idiomatic vernaculars of the people which can be read and used by people who have just been released from their life-long bondage of illiteracy by the literacy campaign methods. In so doing, the church will not only greatly serve but will win the allegiance of many who may be led through the use of inspiring worship materials to fellowship with God as they learn to read.

The church will in its worship life, then, celebrate and exalt three great areas of life: the farmer's relationship to the soil and the natural resources of the earth; the rural home; and the development of the rural Christian community on the basis of the ideals of the Kingdom of God. This in no way ignores the god-war reference of all true worship. But it gives substance and reality to worship to relate it to life; it exalts all personal, occupational, family and social life to the plane of the will and purposes of God: it finds opportunities throughout the

Guidance in worship in the rural churches of the world is of supreme importance, finally, because so much of our worship is based upon a Christian philosophy which we no longer hold, and seems divorced from real life and social issues of our own time and place. We are seeing today as never before the vast range of the implications of the Christian Gospel, and are building our program upon these wider and deeper insights. If, as Charles Clayton Morrison so wisely puts it, "The social gospel can never be a gospel at all until the trained leaders of organized religion employ themselves in the holy business of recreating the liturgies of religion so that the laity may feel the social imperative as explicitly related to the will of God....,"¹ then it is supremely important that the rural churches shall recreate their worship philosophy and expression to include the wider ranges of Christian rural living. Arthur T. Mosher, in his stimulating paper, "The Kingdom of God and Rural Reconstruction," expresses this new demand in clear and thought-provoking terms: "Our program must provide for establishing personal and group habits of prayer, worship, and group expression which explicitly state that the production of shoes, of food, of baskets, of cloth, of pottery, of ploughs is a service rendered to God through ministering to one's neighbor. We have had this explicitness in our rituals in regard to personal piety; we need more of it expressing stewardship and social morality. Each Christian must be made to see, through its place in public worship, that the dedication of one's fields to the service of Christ is an integral part of acceptance of the Christian faith. Our responsive readings, our prayers, our hymns must reflect the imperative of stewardship of health, of utilization of time, of conservation and dedication of productive resources, of the development of personal abilities. We cannot build our ceremonies around a single phase of the Gospel, yet expect our presentation to result in an honest discipleship. If we want our program to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must recast our ceremonies, our hymns, our devotional practises, our orders of worship, until every implication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ blossoms truly and logically out of the very devotional habits and worship literature of the people."²

The interdependence of the wider program of the Christian Gospel for rural life and worship is complete and significant. Without the application of the teaching and way of Christ to rural life, rural church worship will be empty form, unrelated to experience, vapid, uninteresting and peripheral. Without true and vital worship, the comprehensive program of village uplift or rural reconstruction will be building upon sand, and will be doomed to frustration and defeat.

It will be well to examine now some of the areas of rural life with which vital worship should be intimately and vitally related. The foundation-stone of the wider program of rural Christian work is appreciation of and intelligent consecrated stewardship of the Holy Earth. Christian agriculture has passed from the stages of exploitation and a paramount seeking for private gain to a sense of stewardship and appreciation. This is part of our Gospel. It is biblical realism applied to rural life and processes. If this be true, it must find expression in worship. Such occasions of worship should be found, and such use made of the treasures of worship materials that this sense of appreciation and stewardship will be strengthened, celebrated and given expression through them. What a person holds central in his communion with God, both individually and corporately, will become a part of his very being.

The dependence of the farmer upon God in his work, for the orderly succession of seedtime and harvest, of the coming of the rains and the winds, the snow and the sunshine, has found expression in worship materials, prayers, hymns and thought. But today we need new emphasis on the aspect of stewardship and cooperation with God in the production of food and clothing and other goods for mankind. The sense of stewardship and a glad and free acceptance of that stewardship wait for their cele-

1. Charles Clayton Morrison, *The Social Gospel and the Christian Cultus*. 2. Arthur T. Mosher, *The Kingdom of God and Rural Reconstruction*, Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, No. 56, November, 1940.

T. C. Chao published a book in 1931 consisting entirely of Chinese tunes and original hymns which give rich expression to the inner life of the Chinese church. One of the most popular of these hymns is a hoeing song which originated among the farmers of South China. The translation, by Bliss Wiant, is as follows:

Great are Thy mercies, Heavenly Father;
All our food and shelter Thou dost give.
Serving Thee, every day, humbly would I live.
I'm a tender blade of grass--Breathe on me!

The tune is really Chinese, immensely popular, and is sung everywhere.

Services of dedication of threshing floors and wells, or of barns or fields, are coming to light in many lands. They provide occasions of real and true worship right in the daily toil of the farmer. The First Fruits Festival which we celebrated here this morning in dedication of the products of the Holy Earth and of our own lives to God is only slightly changed from a service worked out and used by some young Indian pastors and teachers in a number of villages in Western India. It was a high day for the village of Champavadi when first we used it, and I shall never forget the joy of the village leaders when they saw one farmer after another bring in his bag of grain or basket of fruit, until a great pile of each of several kinds of rice lay gleaming on the earthen floor of their little worship room. The dedication was heartfelt, and the devotional spirit and fellowship life of that little church were greatly strengthened by that occasion.

The working out of these principles in the life of the younger churches has only begun. There is need in every land for devoted servants of Christ with vision to be pioneers in the field of worship. Guidance must be given the younger churches in several ways: The church in the rural areas must be made conscious of its high privileges in worship. To many people worship is remote from life and experience. The cause of their own failure in Christian living is inexplicable to them. Should worship be given its rightful place in the churches, there would be tremendous impetus given to the growth of the church, the respect in which it and its members are held among their neighbors, and in all respects the prestige and power of the rural church would be enhanced. Places of worship must be built, and the impulse to build them should come from the rural church itself. Habits of worship need to be inculcated among the adult Christians and taught to the children and youth of the church everywhere. Materials of worship utilizing the rich heritage of both streams, as described above, should be provided in sufficient quantity that every worshipper has access to such materials as he is able to read and use.

The failure of the rural churches across the world to make the most of the possibilities of worship experience is partially due to the inexperience and lack of training of the ministry in the principles and conduct of worship. There should be in every seminary in the older and younger churches courses which give every ministerial student thorough grounding in the principles of worship. Research departments of the great seminaries in the younger churches should do a great deal of work in seeking out those elements in national culture which have a place in Christian worship, and in working out observances of Christian festivals, orders of service utilizing these resources, and in adapting the Christian year for the country. There should be in each country a Christian architect thoroughly trained who can guide the church in the building of its houses of worship in harmony with the best architectural traditions of his native land, at the same time developing something distinctly Christian. Christian artists should be encouraged to devote their finest talent to the production of pictures which will add to the devotional treasures of the church. Poets and musicians are needed in every land to pour out the treasures of their art in the service of God through the worship of the Christian church. The keenest thinkers in the church should give some of their time to bringing the worship practice of the church so in line with the best thought of the church that worship, instead of being a museum example of cultural lag, shall be the living dynamic for all the social action of the church, the deep well-spring of power for a church which goes forth with strength to capture the countryside for Christ, the Christ of the country road.

I would recommend finally that much thought be given to the production of worship literature. The collection of effective orders of service from all rural lands, the development of new forms of worship which express the expanding life of the rural church, the writing of new hymns of rural life, fresh interpretations of the Gospel in the light of our larger understanding of rural life, all these are urgent fields for the thought and research of Christian scholars across the world.

"And after these things I saw, and behold a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,....saying, 'Salvation unto our God!'"